

VZCZCXRO9741

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DE RUEHSQ #0330 1011637  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4501  
INFO RUEHDL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0019  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
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RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA  
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK

UNCLAS SKOPJE 000330

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE, S/I

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MK](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO IRAQ EFFORT

**¶1.** (U) Deputy Senior Advisor on Iraq Robert Deutsch and his State and DoD team visited Skopje April 5-6 to thank GOM officials and parliamentarians for Macedonia's support for international efforts in Iraq, and to discuss developments in Iraq. (NOTE: Macedonia currently has 40 troops deployed to Iraq in support of MNF-I.) Deutsch and his team met with Deputy Foreign Minister Hasanovic; CHOD MG Stojanovski; MOD State Secretary Petroski; the national security advisers of the Prime Minister and the President; and with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Parliamentary Defense and Foreign Policy Committees. They also met with Macedonian Special Forces troops who had served in Iraq.

**¶2.** (SBU) Referring to the U.S. as Macedonia's "strategic partner," Deputy FM Hasanovic outlined Macedonia's active contributions to the war on terror, especially in Iraq, and said the government would continue that support in the future. He said the GOM was proud to be part of the international effort to bring security and development to Iraq, and indicated that Macedonia would be willing to do even more to support that effort if necessary.

**¶3.** (SBU) Both the CHOD and MOD State Secretary echoed Hasanovic's remarks concerning Macedonia's continuing commitment to the Iraq effort. They also reiterated the offer to provide three officers to the NATO Training Mission-Iraq, and said they were awaiting an official reply from NATO to that offer. The CHOD noted the expense involved in supporting their Iraq and Afghanistan deployments and expressed the hope that Macedonia's U.S. Foreign Military Financing funding would -- at a minimum -- be restored to previous years' levels.

**¶4.** (SBU) Parliamentary Foreign Policy Chair Teuta Arifi told the team that there had never been any dilemmas or doubts about Macedonia's support for the Iraq effort. Responding to a question about whether upcoming parliamentary elections might delay parliamentary approval of the mandate for the next rotation of Macedonian troops to Iraq, Arifi said the U.S. could "count on a timely renewal." Arifi added that "we want an Iraqi success story," underscoring how crucial that would be for the region as a whole. In a subsequent discussion, the national security advisers to the Prime Minister and the President both reassured the Deutsch team that there would be no delay in the approval of the June mandate for the next troop rotation.

**15. (U) Comment:** The interagency team's visit to Skopje was much appreciated by Macedonian interlocutors, who were pleased to hear USG words of praise for Macedonia's contributions. The visit received positive press coverage in the country's most prominent foreign affairs newspaper and in several other media outlets. Although political and public support for Macedonia's deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan remains strong, the visit nevertheless was a useful exercise in coalition maintenance, and allowed the GOM to underscore its longer-term commitment to the Iraq effort.

MILOVANOVIC